

A CENTURY OF SONNETS

BERTRAM DOBELL

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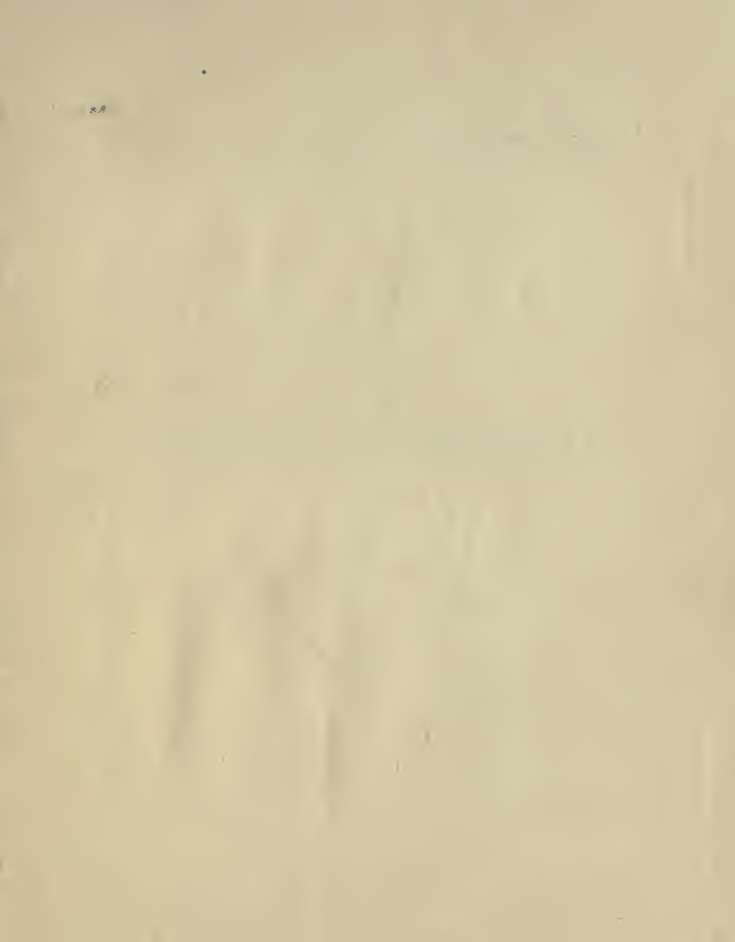
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A CENTURY OF SONNETS



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BY


BERTRAM DOBELL

AUTHOR OF "ROSEMARY AND PANSIES," "SIDELIGHTS ON CHARLES
LAMB," ETC.; AND EDITOR OF THE WORKS OF THOMAS
TRAHERNE, WILLIAM STRODE, AND JAMES
THOMSON ("B.V.")



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TO
M. C. G. J.

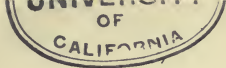
Dear friend of many years, the ever kind,
And ever generous praiser of my song,
To you, if aught of worth is here enshrined,
It doth by right of sympathy belong.

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THE ARTIST

IS fame the great reward for which you write ?

Oh, no ! long since I have renounced that hope.
Perhaps 'tis gain that doth your pen incite ?

A better chance would broom and crossing ope.
Why spend yourself then in a fruitless toil ?

For man's delight no nightingale doth sing,
Nor shines the sun because it loves earth's soil :

Not from the things without doth beauty spring ;
Love dwelleth only in a lovely soul :

Art is the artist's all-sufficient end,
And to create things beautiful his goal :

Never to please the crowd will he descend :
Let him but chant his song and paint his dream,
What cares your Blake though all the world blaspheme ?

IDEAL BEAUTY

THAT world the poet and the artist view
With eyes long trained its beauty to admire
Is but a shadowed path or avenue,
Through which to reach the land of heart's desire :
All beauty thus of greater beauty speaks,
And fills the soul with longings infinite
For what it may not find yet ever seeks,
And finding not, can know no true delight.
The sun when shining in its fullest splendour
Much more conceals than shows of loveliness ;
Nor can a Claude Lorraine or Shelley render,
Howe'er he strive, his vision's fine excess :
Yet rarely in the moonlight or at dawn
The vision comes—alas ! how soon withdrawn !

INSPIRATION

BUT rarely may one feel that glow of thought
Which fuses in its fire words, sense and soul,
Into a living and organic whole,
A fine imagination finely wrought :
How great my bliss when thus inspired I feel,
And thoughts and words come freely and unbidden
Such as I dreamed not in my mind were hidden,
And to myself a self unknown reveal !
Then do I know I labour not in vain,
And that the thoughts thus written shall endure,
Though evil fate may for awhile obscure
Their worth, or critics slight them or disdain.
Vanity? No! *That* doth its own commend ;
What here I speak of doth myself transcend.

LIFE'S HOURS OF RAPTURE

THOUGH I must hold that life, if viewed aright,
Is rarely aught but an ill-omened gift
Bestowed on man by fate's caprice or spite,
Which cares not to what maelstrom he may drift :
Yet there are times when hours of pure delight
A recompense for days of darkness bring :
When we attain our nature's noblest height
And songs of joy for life's great blessing sing.

These periods of delight unheralded
Visit us from no source that we may know :
Come they from ancient Edens vanishèd,
Or do they future halcyon times foreshow ?
Or teach us what our daily life might be
Could we our souls from evil passions free ?

THE CRY OF HUMANITY

O H ! what a weary pilgrimage I've paced,
Only to learn that vain is all I've learned !
What will-o'-th'-wisps and shadows have I chased !
For what mean things and empty pleasures yearned !
How vainly delved for truth in falsehood's mines !
What trust I've given only to be betrayed !
What pagan altars hailed for holy shrines !
What vain fantastic prayers have I prayed !
What mirage-like illusions have I cherished !
In what blind alleys sought a way to find !
My faith, my love, my hope, how have they perished
For sins that were not sins how have I pined !
And in all ways what skill I've shewn (poor elf !)
In finding means to plague and curse myself !

THE WASTE OF LIFE

HOW much doth run to waste of human life !

What dreary controversies, profitless,
And fruitful only of debate and strife

Possess our thoughts, fill us with bitterness !
In serious trifling or in idle play,

As though infinity of time were ours,
We fritter all the precious hours away,

Mistaking chaff for corn and weeds for flowers.
Wisdom we scorn and phantasies pursue,

And wilfully our souls emasculate,
Until we cannot tell the false from true,

So much our nature we sophisticate :
Such has been, is, and—must I say?—will be
The tragic lot of poor humanity.

THE WORLD'S WANT

'TIS courage that mankind doth chiefly need ;
 Courage the false to scorn, though fair and smooth ;
 Courage to seek and shrink not from the truth ;
Courage if need be for its sake to bleed ;
Courage to brand as false an evil creed ;
 Courage to welcome worth in garb uncouth ;
 Courage to keep in age the spirit of youth ;
Courage the cry of Faintheart not to heed.

'Tis courage only can the world redeem
 From all the nightmare ills it suffers under ;
Without it even the best and wisest scheme
 To mend it will but prove a futile blunder ;
Error and tyranny must rule supreme
 Till men shall dare to rend their chains asunder.

SLEEP AND DEATH

S LUMBER doth oft transfigure : I have seen
Plain faces grow quite beautiful in sleep :
Death too doth render comely and serene
Faces whereon dwelt frowns and wrinkles deep.
In sleep our better selves to us return,
Untroubled by the passionate desires
And evil thoughts that in the daytime burn,
And eat our hearts out with their baleful fires.
This is the worst affliction of man's life,
That only when unconscious may he gain
A truce from that corroding cruel strife
That makes it but a synonym for pain :
Of all good things then is not death the best,
Since that alone can bring us perfect rest ?

CONSOLATION?

WHAT consolation does a true man need
Who has played fearlessly his part in life?
In living it he has received his meed

Of happiness, and so may rest from strife,
Content that consciousness is his no more.

Life is at best a gift of doubtful good ;
“ Call no man happy till his life is o’er,”

One said who deeply felt and understood :
So to the man whose hapless lot has been

Beset with care, misfortune, and distress,
Death cometh like a lovely and serene

Sun-setting after storm to calm and bless :
On happiness death sets the final seal,
And misery no more its woes doth feel.

PERVERSTY

AH! how malignant was the fate that ruled

O'er the creation of poor human-kind,
That sent man forth unpiloted, unschooled,

To all the pitfalls in his pathway blind!

Around him swarm unnumbered enemies

Whom he with weapons all too weak must fight:

Once beaten down how hardly shall he rise,

Or how escape the world's corroding blight?

Yet may he triumph over every foe

While faithful to himself he yet remains,

But 'tis his great and overmastering woe

That in himself a traitor lives and reigns,

A spirit of Perverseness that misleads,

And ever with its mischief taints his deeds.

THE ISOLATION OF GENIUS

GREAT souls must ever isolated stand,
For if they would they cannot share their thought
With the irrational and careless band
To whom wise lessons never can be taught :
Companionless they ever must exist ;
No kinship with their nearest kin have they,
For none their earnest strivings can assist,
And none accompany their lonely way.
Their doubts, fears, joy, themselves alone may know,
Though known it may be to some unknown brother ;
As stars that in the heavens together show,
Though a vast space divides them from each other :
This is and must be of such souls the doom,—
To hold within themselves their joy or gloom.

MAN'S NATURAL RULERS

HOW few there are with natures wholly sound,
In harmony with themselves and Nature too,
Whose outlook to no narrow range is bound,
And who do ever reason's path pursue !
Such are the stars and suns of human-kind,
The natural kings and rulers of the earth,
If men were not to truth and wisdom blind,
Or could distinguish worthlessness from worth :
But it is part of life's strange tragedy
That men (who must some bolder spirits follow)
Scarce ever know who their true leaders be,
And choose instead some idol false and hollow :
So is it nations into ruin run,
By want of noble counsellors undone.

THE POWER OF WILL

WHY do we shrink from those appointed tasks
Which 'tis our urgent duty to fulfil,
Even when to do them no stern effort asks,
And wanting only is the firm-set will ?
Aye ! there it is, lacking the will we lack
The spring that all our powers in action sets,
Whence they in useless impotence lie slack,
Since that alone their potency begets.
Not those of deepest wisdom, keenest wit,
The highest prizes, greatest triumphs gain,
But those whose will to powers less noble knit
Is strong to endure the long and hard campaign.
Will's wit ; but wit, alas ! is oft not will,
And thus is wit poor and unprosperous still.

ROBERT BROWNING'S OPTIMISM

SHOULD he who gains much happiness from life
(Which some, fate's petted favourites, may do),
Look coldly on the all-disastrous strife

Of the unfavoured mass who struggle through
An overburdened, ever-anxious lot,

And blandly thus address them : " Look at me
And take example ! Wherefore do you not

Cease to complain and life's full glory see :
I grant you *seem* most wretched : but in truth

That your's the fault is God and I can find
Infinity of reasons : in good sooth

• He who denies all's well is deaf and blind !"
Fine preaching ! but methinks I've heard such lore
From many a fat-paunched alderman before.

PASSION *VERSUS* REASON

WHEREFORE is man to sense so much a slave,
And beauty but a bait to tempt to lust ?
Tell me why reason such small power should have,
That weakly murmurs ' should ' where lust says ' must ' ?
We strive our evil impulses to rout,
And guide our course by virtue's steady light,
Form resolutions of resistance stout
To all the assailing powers of appetite :
But when we of ourselves feel most assured
A gust of fierce desire assails the soul,
Beats down the guards with which it seemed secured,
And gone are wise resolve and self-control !
Hard fate of man, so tossed on passion's shelf
He ne'er may be the master of himself !

THE FUTURE

I KNOW not what I would not sacrifice
To view the things in time to come concealed,
If by some necromantical device
The world ten centuries hence might be revealed :
So should I learn what seeds of thoughts now sown
Will then have reached a full and lusty life ;
What others, on oblivion's dustheap thrown,
Will then no more stir argument or strife :
See too what heights our children will have gained
Above ourselves in morals, science, wit,
Should they indeed have greater heights attained,
Or still our baser qualities transmit :
Thus should I learn if "progress" is a dream,
Or if man's future will his past redeem.

THE UNITY OF NATURE

NATURE is Oneness : in it are no parts,

But everywhere a perfect Unity

Which all creation in one map encharts,

And to all mysteries is the master-key :

Nothing in nature lives for its own sake,

But all, as notes in music, to complete

The harmony that they in concert make,

Since none content alone, however sweet,

All opposites grow into one at last ;

There is no ill that goodness does not leaven :

No breeze could be without the whirlwind's blast ;

Hell finally transforms itself to heaven ;

Let nothing from this truth your mind persuade,

And of its issues never be afraid.



THE ONE AND THE ALL

“ **M**AN’S soul is but a portion of the All
From which it issues and to which returns ;
Shall not the Power that sent it forth recall
It to itself when reason it discerns ? ”
Ah yes ! the All, I doubt not, is supreme,
And man must meekly to its dictates bow,
Yet I could sometimes its decrees blaspheme
That with so small a wealth doth man endow :
Against the ties that bind me to the All,
I strive and what I am I fain would be,
And rather into nothingness would fall
Than serve a heartless cold Necessity :
So Conciuousness the ever grasping, speaks,
And for what may not be for ever seeks.

KNOWLEDGE NOT WISDOM

A LONG the path of science as we go
Each day some new discovery repays
Our eager quest, that searches high and low,
And ever grows more skilled in Nature's ways :
We weigh the atom that no human eye
Will ever see, measure the trembling ray
From some far sun in what was vacant sky
To the explorer of an earlier day.—

Yes, yes, all this is so, and, if you please,
'Tis fit we should much jubilation show ;
But yet, with all this marvellous increase
Of knowledge, does our wisdom also grow ?
Small is the measure of our boasted gain
If knowledge bring not wisdom in its train.

TRUTH'S GUIDING STAR

IN the dim twilight of our troubled life,
Where none may see with vision wholly clear,
And all must tread a path with pitfalls rife,
With scarce a star their gloomy path to cheer ;
While those who with most confidence proclaim
Themselves as keepers of the keys of truth,
Most oft are but mere windbags skilled to frame
Poor sophistries or specious falsehoods smooth,—
I find no better guidance than is found
In the assurance that whate'er may chance
A soul resolved truth's deepest wells to sound
Fearless, nor viewing consequence askance,
Is armed against sick thoughts and fabled creeds,
And all the ills that morbid fancy breeds.

THE GREAT NORTHERN EXPRESS

IT rushes on, the embodiment of Force,
Devouring Distance and defeating Time,
With power resistless moving on its course,
A common sight indeed, yet how sublime !
Water and Fire, man's most effectual Friends,
Though each may prove his most malignant Foe,
Are yoked together here to serve his ends,
And to his will a proud obedience show.

'Tis thus that Planets make their way through Space,
Their course marked out even to a hair's-breadth line ;
But at the bidding of what Power they race,
What energy dæmonic or divine
Controls them, or if changeless Law doth guide—
Philosophy may guess but not decide.

MAN AND NATURE

'TIS the chief source of man's unhappiness
That he regards himself as Nature's crown,
To favour whom Fate should relax its stress,
And never on his greatness dare to frown :
How small his part upon the Eternal Stage,
What petty passions rage within his breast,
His microscopic vision cannot gauge,
But magnifies his actions worst and best
To huge proportions. Let him learn at last
He's but a bubble on the ocean wave,
A grain of sand upon the seashore vast :
This learned all's learned ; for then he will not crave
More than his due, since this the knowledge brings
Of his true place in the great scheme of things.

THE PARADOX OF CREATION

A SPECK within a boundless Universe
His home, and he an atom on that speck,
The slave of tyrant forces that coerce
His will, and all his aspirations check ;
And yet a being made to dominate
The world of sense by mind's controlling power :
Spoiled favourite at once and sport of fate,
Time's fool indeed, yet its consummate flower !
Alone did Nature to his soul impart
A spark of her divinest energy,
Power to create the wondrous world of art,
And gave, in giving thought, her master key :
So great and yet so little ! blessed and cursed—
Nature's most noble offspring—yet her worst !

THE SOLE REALITY

EACH one doth for himself a world create
Wherein he rests self-centred and supreme :
There he abideth in unquestioned state
Fearing no deposition. If a dream
This realm is (as to others it must be)
It ever is and must be real to him,
And is indeed the sole reality ;
All else is mere illusion, vague and dim.
Above himself he cannot apprehend,
Thought, sentiment or feeling. Howsoe'er
He seeks his own true nature to transcend
'Tis all in vain : therefore let him forbear
To force on other men his faith or thought,
Since his to them as theirs to him are naught.

A POET'S APOLOGY

“WHY of yourself do you for ever write,
Tiring us with your dreams, your loves and woes?
Your thoughts and passions are a web too slight
On which to weave a structure so verbose.”
My friend, when I can wander in the sun
Divested of my shadow, then will I
Seek from myself and mine own thoughts to run,
And strive new realms of fancy to descry.
The poet, though a Shakespeare, is a man,
And all men live within his plastic mind,
And so, if truly in his verse he can
Express himself he mirrors all mankind :
Only when he is to himself untrue
Do Nature and the Muse betray him too.

ON READING ONE OF MY EARLY POEMS

I WROTE it and approved it in my youth,
And then it seemed a masterpiece of wit
Full of poetic fire and novel truth,
Expressed in nervous words and phrases fit :
Its commonplaces brilliant fancies seemed,
Its untuned speech was music to mine ear ;
Its windy sentiment I fondly deemed
A heartfelt utterance of thought sincere.

Well, it was fitting I should think so then,
It is through error that we win our way
To knowledge and to wisdom : only when
Experience fails its lessons to convey,
And we in age youth's follies still commit
Do we convict ourselves of want of wit.

DEPRESSION

HOW sad his fate who labours with the thought
That every effort must a failure prove !
And such is mine, for seldom have I wrought
The thing my better judgment might approve.
To form great projects only to discover
How weak and all inadequate my powers :
To know the Muse, though fervently I love her,
Condemns me to the toil of wasted hours—
Was ever known a gloomier fate than this ?
A tragedy that holds a deeper sadness
He need not fear (so far is he from bliss)
Who sees no hope his toil will end in gladness :
Yet will I choose, however ill I fare,
Labour in vain rather than blank despair.

EXALTATION

LAPPED in a peace profound my spirit lies,
Its perfect calm no passions agitate ;

No ghosts from out the shadowed past arise

The tale of bygone sufferings to relate :

Whatever woe to-morrow's dawn may bring

It cannot this great present bliss destroy,

Or jar the music which my soul doth sing

Of unmarred concord, unimagined joy.

I seem to have reached another world more fair

Than ours, where discords vex no more the ear,

Where life and happiness are one, and where

Sorrow comes not, nor suffering, nor fear :

Ah ! yet I fear such happiness portends

Some ill, since all delight in sadness ends.

RÉSIGNATION

TO form great projects which a dozen lives
To execute would be by far too short,
Though each were as a Cromwell's or a Clive's,
And fate disposed to favour, not to thwart :
To long for action, yet feel impotent
To act were action offered to my hand ;
To mourn o'er time and energy misspent
While runneth out my life's fast-falling sand :
Could fate a sadder destiny devise
When most disposed to humble human pride ?
But yet my soul no more it mortifies,
And I in patient fortitude abide :
For still I am myself, nor would I be
Another even for an empire's fee.

TWILIGHT LIFE

I LIVE a twilight life—not dark, but yet
Enjoying but a dim uncertain light ;
Not glad, nor sad, filled with no dark regret,
But ever less akin to day than night :
The pleasures once so ravishing no more
Can fill me with their rapture—for I know
Earthward we fall at last though high we soar,
And time must soon all gladness overthrow :
But yet I feel not now the bitterness
That once I felt 'gainst unpropitious fate,
For stealing age that makes our pleasures less,
The pressure too of sorrow doth abate :
So now I rest content, whate'er befall,
To live or die—"the readiness is all."

LIFE-WEARINESS

LAST night, much tired with work and anxious thought
When I at last upon my couch reclined,
Discouragement so evilly had wrought
On throbbing heart and over-wearied mind,—
Well will it be, said I, if nevermore
From that deep slumber which will soon be mine,
I wake, for till life's bitter combat's o'er,
Aid comes not, either human or divine :
What solace or delight doth fate provide
For the expense of so much painful breath,
Since all are whelmed at last in Lethe's tide,
And good and ill alike are paid with death ?
And then I slept and dreamt I still possessed
Youth's dauntless spirit, strong and undepressed.

THE INNER LIGHT

I.

WE see our friends fall round us, and their loss
Scarce leaves a blank even for a little space,
And soon their memory doth not more engross
Our thoughts than thoughts of those whose lives we trace
In chronicle or fiction. Oft they leave
Nothing to show that they have ever been,
For little in their lives did they achieve
Save to walk through their brief parts on the scene.

'Tis well perchance it should be so—and why
Should I revolt against the common fate?
I know not, save that in my soul doth lie
A feeling from the dawn of thought innate,
That not to live and die thus was I born,
But to achieve some deed that none could scorn.

II.

PERCHANCE mere vanity doth prompt that thought,
And I am, like the mass of human-kind,
An accident of accidents, in naught
Favoured by fate or fortune? If my mind
Is fitted for the subtler work of thought,
And so is for more arduous tasks designed
Than others of a coarser texture wrought,
Comes that alone from casualty blind?

I know not if it be so : but I know
That in my inmost soul there burns a flame
Which ever doth with clear refulgence glow,
And ever points towards some noble aim :
From vanity if this avowal flow
Let those who have it not its utterance blame !

LONELINESS

MY ever-busy thoughts fly here and there,
And now rejoice, and now with sadness yearn ;
All heights and depths of contemplation dare,
Yet ever to one central point return :—
The thought of my so solitary life,
So alien to the common life around ;
For ever with its petty aims at strife,
Yet to it in a galling bondage bound :
Men speak a language foreign to my ears ;
The things most dear to me are naught to them ;
They jest at things more fit, methinks, for tears,
And they approve what I must needs condemn :
And so men understand me not, and I
Perchance too much mine own self magnify.

DESPONDENCY

SENSE of defeat, why visit me so oft
Upon the very threshold of success?
Why, when my spirit fain would soar aloft,
Dost thou its wings with weariness downpress?
Why dost thou ever whisper in mine ear
In accents of discouragement and doubt,
And sickly all my projects with the fear
Of half-attainment or disastrous rout?

Avaunt! I will not listen to thy voice,
For fear of evil counsellors is worst;
And though in triumph I may not rejoice,
I'll not submit to thee, Despair accurst!
I've seen thee face to face and know thou art
But the reflection of a craven heart.

AFTERWARDS

SOME day the sun will rise, but I shall rise
No more its warmth and radiance to enjoy,
But lie a cold unconscious sacrifice

To ravening time's fierce passion to destroy :
And will the world when I am gone proceed,
Oblivious of me, on its common way ?
Forlorn of me, will it not feel some need,
Some premonition of its own decay ?

Perish such vain and childish thoughts as these !

The taper's use is o'er when fails its light :
Gladly shall fall my outworn energies
Into the bosom of the Infinite,
Grateful that I so many years have been
An actor on so vast and strange a scene !

JANUARY 1, 1884

A KEEN, cold, searching and remorseless wind—
A gloomy and fog-laden atmosphere—
Darkness above and slush below—small cheer
Can such a morn bring to the anxious mind
That, brooding o'er past sorrows, fain would find
Some comfort in the coming days appear,
And with new hope would greet the new-born year,
With fate no longer adverse or unkind.
Such days, when youth has passed, are hard to bear :
A little sunshine one would fain enjoy,
Would some small solace taste ere time destroy
The power to cope with torpor and despair ;
Would feel oneself not wholly desolate,
Nor the mere puppet of relentless fate.

DECEMBER 31, 1897

MILD April weather—not a touch of frost,
Such as befits the season of the year—
No landscape with a robe of snow embossed ;
No raging storm to daunt the mariner :
And so 'tis well, for frost-bound winter means
Keen suffering alike to man and beast,
Wherefore I gladly miss its snow-clad scenes,
And cruel wind that bloweth from the east.

The year is dead, and death must ever move
Compassion even in the coldest breast ;
It shakes us rudely from our wonted groove,
And sends thought forth upon a dreary quest :
So though the past year brought less good than ill,
Farewell I bid it with reluctance still.

JANUARY 1, 1904

METHOUGHT I heard a whisper in my ear—
“Why at your age still labour on in vain?

Why give yourself a world of needless pain
With no reward your ceaseless toil to cheer?”

A moment's weakness shook me—then with clear

And steady accents I replied, “I gain

Such a reward as pays for all—attain

Power still towards the light my course to steer,

My spirit save from apathy and decay;

And if to some fresh height I may not climb,

Yet will I in the twilight of my day

That path I vowed to tread when in my prime

Still follow till the last faint glimmering ray

Of sunset sinks within the waves of time.”

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL SUFFERING

PAIN! thou hast kept me all the night awake,
And still thou dost torment me with thy sting,
So that all joy of life has taken wing,
And I could welcome death thy power to break.
What unforgivable and deadly sin
Have I committed to be punished so,
With such extreme unintermitted woe
As Dante made his lost souls welter in?

Well, try me to the full: at least thy reign
Makes me oblivious of that mental anguish
Wherein so oft my hapless soul doth languish,
Which yet is keener, harder to sustain:
Better thy tortures than the tortured mind
Harassed by hopeless love and fate unkind.

DECEMBER 31, 1907

MY course is almost done, and soon the sleep
That comes to all will visit my tired eyes,
And I shall gain that rest profound and deep
From which no call can force me to arise :
And welcome shall that dreamless slumber be,
For now the fierce desire for life has fled :
The passionate soul as on a tideless sea
Rests calmly : hope and fear alike are dead.
No longer am I filled with rage or scorn,
Nor do I now at adverse fate repine ;
No more I deem myself a soul forlorn
On whom no ray of hope or joy may shine :
Played well or ill the drama's near its end,
Nor would I, if I might, its acts extend.

LIFE'S INDIAN SUMMER

MY fate how much unlike the common lot !
A youth of poverty and grinding toil ;
Then a long period of obscure turmoil ;
When all things seemed against my peace to plot :
Yet through all ills hope I abandoned not,
And ever felt that from misfortune's coil
My better star at last would disembroil
My spirit and a kinder fate allot :
Then when it seemed as if, by Nature's law,
Dreamer and dreams were hastening to their end,
Fate, so unkind before, became my friend,
Gave earnest of that fame my youth foresaw,
And gives me now (a miracle indeed !)
Youth's sanguine spirit and impassioned creed !

1909

THE UNCONQUERED SPIRIT

MEN look on me as old, and old in years
I am, with many a trace of toil and pain,

But yet the spirit within me still avers

Its youth, and doth time's deadening power disdain :
'Tis my belief the best of life's to come

Even now : for all of good that I have known
Has come to me with age, and still the sum

Of good lacks one great gift I fain would own :

Yet Time and Death ! thy mercy I'll not ask ;

Deal with me as with other men ye deal :
When once my high heart falters at its task

The ills of death-in-life let me not feel ;
But whensoever my courage once doth quail,
Even in that instant let my being fail !

Nov., 1909.

THE THOUGHT OF DEATH

I FEEL no terror at the thought of death,
Which cheerfully and calmly I can meet,
For 'tis with effort now I draw my breath,
And mere existence is no longer sweet :
Yet when I think that with me too must die
The garnered knowledge of so many years,
Of which I can bequeath no legacy,
I own some sadness in my soul it stirs ;
And when I think too there will die with me
The many fancies folded in my brain,
Which else might come to blest maturity,
But then can never life or form obtain,—
I must confess it brings to me some pain,
Though yet I know I should the thought disdain.

AN AGNOSTIC'S PRAYER

I PRAY not, for I hold that prayer is vain,
Since, whatsoever Powers control man's fate,
I cannot think that any cry of pain

From him would change their course predestinate :
But if those Powers I ever supplicate,

Thus will I seek a boon from them to gain,—
“ I ask ye not for lands, or wealth, or state ;

Nor fame nor love would I from ye obtain ;
But give me strength to gaze with steady eyes

Into the causes and the roots of things,
And see them, unbeguiled by outward shows,
Stripped naked of all trappings that disguise,
Till truth—though she my soul with torture wrings—
Herself unrobed, unshadowed, doth disclose.”

REDEMPTION

DEAF to our passionate prayers the gods remain,
Enlightening not our ignorance or doubt ;
The prayers we utter all alike are vain,
Whether from lips devout or undevout :
Why then burn incense to them, why adore,
Since adoration's ever profitless ?
Rise from your knees and vow that nevermore
Will you to deaf ears futile prayers address :
'Tis to himself alone that man can trust,
No saviour is there but himself alone ;
That he should answer for his deeds is just—
Not God but man must for man's sins atone :
Redemption cometh only from within ;
To take it from without were still to sin.

SAVIOURS

WHY will ye ever for a Saviour cry ?

The coward and the credulous alone
Seek a Redeemer—fools who think to buy

Peace with another's pain, and not their own.
Will ye not learn no man was ever yet

Redeemed who had not strength himself to save ?
That none may shun the payment of his debt

Who would not make himself another's slave ?
Your sins are yours, and justice bids you bear

Their burden with what constancy you may :
A coward only asks his friend to share

The penalty fate calls on him to pay :
Whatever is uncertain, this is sure—
That his own Cross each mortal must endure.

TO A DEVOTEE

RISE from your knees, sick-thoughted sufferer !

Your prayers but serve to enervate your soul ;
Fate listens to no fond idolater ;

No Power exists whom you can thus cajole.
Your self-distrust is cowardice at best ;

Prayer unavailing adds but to your pain :
'Tis active work, not passive prayer, makes blest :

Your sin's created by your morbid brain.
Arise, and be no more a suppliant slave ;

God is no Genghiz Khan or Tamerlane :
All nature thunders forth one precept brave—

Courage alone shall life's true end attain.
Weakness above all else the fates despise,
The fearless-hearted only are the wise.

THE POET OF IMPERIALISM

HE thinks the world for Englishmen was made,
And other races only should exist
By their permission : whip or stick in fist
By force, not love, he'd have her rule obeyed
By subject races. Bulldog-like he growls
And shows his teeth at all who dare to call
Their souls their own. He spills his choicest gall
On those who dare to speak of peace. He scowls
At talk of times when force no more shall rule,
And love, truth, justice, shall be paramount :
Mere piffle all such words he doth account
Uttered by knaves the nation to befool :
To all the lessons of experience blind,
Britain, he thinks, can bully all mankind.

FAITH *VERSUS* REASON

“ **B**ECAUSE it is incredible I hold
The dogma true,” an ancient Father said,
And well said too, for when with reason cold
Your faith you test it is already dead :
Faith ever feels that reason is its foe,
And ever doth denounce the questioning mind ;
And would even now by rack and thumbscrew show
Its hatred, were its will with power combined.

Faith, of all words the most equivocal,
Whose meaning varies with the latitude,
Of blood and tears has been more prodigal
Than all the other terms that men delude :
Poor foolish man ! from birth to death the prey
Of pompous words that madden and betray !

ON READING A RELIGIOUS BIOGRAPHY

WHAT record of a little soul is here,
What want of manliness and self-respect,
What vile servility and shivering fear,
What a display of selfishness abject !
Such whinings neither God nor man can please ;
Such cant all healthy natures will disgust ;
No Christ would die to save such souls as these,
Such self-abasing grovellers in the dust.

Well might the old heroic Romans hate
A faith producing such degenerate fruit,
So apt man's nature to debilitate,
And fainting fear for valour substitute :
For a brave faith the noble spirit craves ;
Give us a creed for men, and not for slaves !

THE PARADOX-MONGER

WITH gay assurance he will undertake
To prove all's right in heaven and on earth ;
That no such thing as evil e'er had birth,
Or that 'twas really born for goodness' sake :
He'll bring a godless nation back to God,
The Devil too he'll rehabilitate,
And either at your choice will vindicate
With logic much like Gilbert's, and as odd :
Questions of fate, necessity, free-will,
He settles easily as A B C :
For every mystery he has a key ;
A verbal quip accounts for every ill.
How welcome were a Rabelaisian laugh
While thus he's dealing out his meal of chaff !

THE DEMAGOGUE

I LISTENED to his smooth insidious tongue
So artfully adapted to his crowd
Of unenlightened hearers, who with loud
Applause received the phrases deftly strung,
To flatter them and to their greed appeal.
Their ignorance and prejudices he
(Taught by long practice) played on skilfully,
And yet did all unconsciously reveal
His crafty nature, false and insincere :
Spite of himself his vulgar nature shows
Itself, which to no great ideal owes
Fealty, but by self-interest doth steer :
So self-convicted, self-condemned he stands,
Despite the multitude's loud-clapping hands.

BISMARCK

(Written after reading Busch's Biography of him)

I.

A MASTER-CRAFTSMAN in a hateful trade ;
A mean defamer and ungenerous foe
Of women : a modern Machiavelli swayed
By evil thoughts and passions coarse and low :
A man without a scruple or a care
For truth or justice, holding might for right :
An arrogant spirit that would all things dare
To gratify its vengeance or its spite ;
An emblem of incarnate selfishness :
Such is the picture painted by the hand
Of one compelled his failings to confess ;
That meant to flatter, but was forced to brand :
A great and forceful figure, if you will,
But great, like Satan, not for good, but ill.

II.

METHINKS I hear a pleading voice that cries
“ Did he not serve his king and country well,
Defeating all his nation’s enemies,
And to the height its power and influence swell ? ”
Glories like these are ever dearly bought,
And have in them of countless ills the seeds ;
Seldom is good by violent courses wrought :
’Tis poison-flowers most oft that bloodshed breeds.

He lived himself to taste the bitterness
Of being “ hoisted with his own petard,”
And found how vain and shortlived the success
Of brutal force that doth not right regard :
Henceforth may bravos such as he no more
Have power a nation’s life-blood to outpour !

AN UNHAPPY MARRIAGE

I.

HIS VIEW OF IT.

WITH bitter mockery, though unaware,
My friends exclaim, "A happy man are you,
Blessed with a wife so virtuous and fair,
Endowed with so much sense, and witty too."
Yet they speak truth, for virtuous and fair
She is, and proud and happy I should be
Were I content with qualities so rare,
If I as others see her could but see :
But there's a barrier our souls between—
A disaccord of feeling and of thought,
The constant source of bickerings unforeseen,
And sudden storms from merest trifles wrought ;
So doomed for ever to a loveless lot
We live : ah ! would but fate untie the knot !

II.

HER VIEW OF IT.

“**H**OW fortunate you are,” say envious friends,
“How happy in your husband’s world-wide fame,
Whose glory will endure till Britain ends,
Which will for ever venerate his name !”
Alas ! his glory is a shadow cold,
Wherein I starve and shiver undelighted ;
Of what avail are costliest gems or gold
To one in desert lands by famine blighted ?
A slave arrayed in glorious attire
And decked with jewels, yet remains a slave :
How should the man all worship and admire
Bethink him that a little love I crave ?
His fame’s a river vast and deep, whose tide
Doth evermore our hearts and souls divide.

THEME FOR A DRAMA

I.

O H how dost thou my simple words distort
To meanings which were never in my mind,
And make my deeds with such suspicions sort
As naught but mere perversity could find !
How far apart are we that live together !
What worlds removed in spirit and in aim !
Shackled by bonds worn willingly by neither,
How every casual spark breaks forth to flame !
Yet should we quarrel not were love quite dead ;
Some compensation in indifference lies,
For then one cares not what is done or said ;
And jealousy no trifle magnifies :
This is the hell of our unhappy fate—
That we at once each other love and hate.

II.

NAY, treat me as you will : your love deny,
Torment me with your fits of mad caprice,
With jealous spleen my spirit crucify,
Rob me of all delight and inward peace :
Rack your invention to devise new means
With which to torture both yourself and me ;
Perversely glory in provoking scenes
Where even Patience could not patient be :
You shall not rob me of my ruthful heart,
Nor yet destroy my all-enduring love,
Which shall not, save with life itself, depart—
Though tempests rage the stars still shine above :
Patience and love shall to the end endure,
And minister to ills they may not cure !

THE TYRANNY OF LOVE

LOVE not if you desire a quiet life ;
Love not if you would soundly sleep at night ;
Love not if you would shun perpetual strife ;
Love not—or take your leave of all delight :
For love is ever man's tyrannic master,
The source of almost every human woe,
A fountain of disquiet and disaster ;
Of peace and happy life the constant foe :
Thus do I rail on love, and yet I love,
And cannot from its tyranny break free,
Prizing a faithless woman's smile above
All else—for I her thrall must ever be :
Man born of woman needs must her adore,
And do her bidding, now and evermore.

LOVE'S COMPENSATIONS

LOVE ! how unhappy in his fate is he
Who never hath thy wondrous power confessed,
Or never ventured on thy stormy sea,

Fearing too much to break his quiet rest :
Perchance he thus escapes much bitter pain ;

Yet if he loved with Romeo's fervent soul,
Knowledge of life's true meaning he would gain,
And feel far more of gladness than of dole.

Expansive, not repressive, is true life,

The unimpassioned man we scarce can call :
We win our way to peace through toil and strife ;

Nectar he shall not taste who shuns life's gall :
They never really live who love disown—
A truth to poets and to lovers known.

LOVE'S VARYING MOODS

HOW various are the lover's moods and strange !

To-day he glories in the prospect fair,

To-morrow's sunk in uttermost despair ;

Nay, hour by hour his humours veer and change :

A frowning brow submerges him in hell,

A smile exalts him to hope's loftiest heaven ;

Reason provides no antidote or leaven,

When low or high his passions sink or swell.

Unquiet ever reigns within his mind,

Since hope and fear wage there a constant strife ;

To nought can he his wandering fancies bind

Save her who is the polestar of his life :

All objects valued once are now despised,

For Love his life has revolutionised.

LOVE'S EXCLUSIVENESS

“LET us be friends !” Ah no ! it cannot be :
Friendship to love may well transmute itself,
But love's a tyrannous and jealous elf
That with cold friendship never can agree :
Love shall be friendship's foe was Jove's decree,
And friendship, when it drifts on passion's shelf,
Can never more return unto itself :
Love ever is for love the only fee.

Oh speak not then of friendship ! In love's mart
Friendship is ever love's antithesis ;
Nor can I find the name upon love's chart ;
The heart is chilled, not warmed, by friendship's kiss :
Love must have all, nor will accept a part :
Give me then all, or else exile from bliss !

A LOVER TO HIS MISTRESS

WHAT subtle charm dost thou about thee bear
By which thou so dost heart and soul affect
That in mine eyes thou'rt placed beyond compare,
And art with every grace of nature decked?
That charm doth not in face or form reside;
Others may in some features lovelier be,
And other eyes have faults in thee descried
Which I shall ever be too blind to see:
But could all charms of all the beauties bright
Whom I have known (and not a few are they)
Be summed in one and doubled, yet how light
Compared with thine should I their claims assay!
Their beauties on frail flesh and youth depend,—
A lovely soul is lovely to the end.

A PLATONIC LOVER

O H might I love thee with a love so pure
That no unworthy thought could stain my soul !
But ever passionate desires allure

With power too strong to brook the will's control :
Ah ! why must love be ever linked with lust,

The spirit and the flesh be married still
In an unlovely union ? Ever must

The senses triumph o'er the nobler will ?
Can that be love which doth itself destroy

In act its own immaculate ideal ?
How can we unabashed, unsullied, joy

In that which doth the brute in us reveal ?
Oh that it might be possible to free
Love from desire and sensuality !

SHAKESPEARE

T IRED with all these, to thee once more I turn :

Of him whose pomp of words hides want of thought ;
Or him whose rhymes the commendation earn

Of those whose praise no true bard ever sought ;
Or him whose mind, on oddest themes intent,

Most oft forgot that rhyme, however deft,
If of the true soul-music innocent,

Is but a skeleton and threadbare weft :
From such as these I turn to thee again,

Certain of inexhaustible delight
In pondering on the issues of that brain

Which did so many gifts in one unite :
Whose range did all things human comprehend,
And to the utmost bounds of thought extend.

THE MORAL OF "HAMLET"

I.

THINK not too deeply on man's life and fate,
For therein lie the seeds of pain and madness :
The shows of things seek not to penetrate
Lest what you see fill you with hopeless sadness :
The world to noble minds is but a hell
Peopled by lecherous and treacherous creatures,
With whom fair souls may not untainted dwell,
For sin must blight them with its satyr's features :
Think not that thought can pierce the mystery
Of why we are, what purpose we fulfil :
Know that 'tis vain to strive with destiny
Which breaks the courage of the strongest will :
Small comfort may in thoughts like these reside,
Yet are they not in *Hamlet* all implied ?

II.

YET not too deeply need we take to heart
The poet's painful lesson : it may be
Not the whole truth, though far too large a part,
And we some good may through the evil see :
Were life all evil it must soon destroy
Itself, and thus itself its evils end,
But in it there is room for love and joy,
And good and ill oft in it strangely blend ;
Nay, evil often will itself transform
To good by strong compulsion of that power
Which rages in the earthquake and the storm,
And yet gives birth to butterfly and flower :
Evil indeed exists not save for men,
And did they perish where were evil then ?

THE SONNETS OF SHAKESPEARE

I.

HAVE we herein the heart-beats of the bard,
And throbbings of his myriad-chambered brain,
Or must we as mere artistry regard
The pulsing passion which the verses feign?
Of Truth and Falsehood is not this the test—
That Falsehood flourishes but for a day,
While Truth, like ivy, ever green doth rest,
Its lusty life defying dull decay?
Life pulses ever through our poet's lines,
The life intense that flowed through brain and heart :
'Tis no false fire that in these lyrics shines,
His own strong spirit animates their art :
The poetaster in falsetto sings,
Rich, clear, and true the poet's anthem rings.

II.

DID Shakespeare with this key unlock his soul,
And tell the secrets of his fiery heart,
Showing that even he could not control

The passions he portrayed with matchless art ?
Yes ! and so shewed himself more and not less

The greatest intellect that time has known,
Since greatness only greatness can express,
As only meanness is by meanness shewn :

No poet ever truly could portray

A passion which himself he did not feel :
He who has known the over-mastering sway

Of love alone its secrets can reveal :
Here heart and soul lie open to our view,
Although not every fool can find the clue.

SUGGESTED BY SHAKESPEARE'S FOURTH
SONNET

A MAN is evermore himself alone,
Nor will he in another, though he be
Twin-brother to his soul and body, own
Aught but a seeming similarity ;
Although so marvellous the counterfeit
That other eyes no difference can see
He knows resemblance is most incomplete
Where likeness should most true and perfect be :
But grant he could his personality
See mirrored perfectly in mind and frame,
Still would he murmur at the harsh decree
That burns up his to light another's flame :
All men would fain be ends themselves, and not
Means only by which others are begot.

SUGGESTED BY SHAKESPEARE'S SIXTH
SONNET

NATURE alas ! more oft perpetuates
 Unpleasing traits or insignificance
Than beauty which her choicest gift she rates,
 And by its rareness doth its price enhance :
So is she prodigal in giving life
 To creatures that seem formed to injure man,
'Gainst whom he must maintain a constant strife,
 And fain would abrogate from Nature's plan.
She is most miserly and yet profuse ;
 Once in a century breeds a king of men,
But faster far than she destroys renews
 The common generations. To her ken
Deformity and beauty equal seem ;
Nor is there good or evil in her scheme.

SUGGESTED BY SHAKESPEARE'S EIGHTH
SONNET

MIRTH to desire from music is but folly ;
 Laughter from no fine melody can flow ;
The rarest concord tends to melancholy,
 Or doth a gentle pensiveness bestow :
Yet music even when most it thrills the heart
 With mournful accents, passion most intense,
Heals where it wounds with strange and subtle art,
 And gives delight in ample recompense.
The highest beauty thus is based on sadness,
 The deepest thought is neighbour to a sigh ;
Yet from sad thoughts may issue truest gladness,
 As brightest stars in darkest night we spy :
So in the deepest tragedies we find
The poet's art relieves and soothes the mind.

SUGGESTED BY SHAKESPEARE'S SEVENTY-
FIRST SONNET

WHO mourned for Britain's Laureate when he died
And left the universe without his peer ?
Not England, heedless of her greatest pride,
Nor he whom most he loved and praised, I fear.
His fellows, his relations, and a friend,
All humble folk, his coffin gathered round,
But no high-stationed patron saw the end :
No echo of his fame did there resound.
He, destined to preserve his country's fame,
When all its other glories are forgot,
Here begs in deep humility and shame,
To be, even by his friend, remembered not :
But while that friend compounded is with clay,
All Time is now the poet's endless day.

SUGGESTED BY SHAKESPEARE'S SEVENTY-
FIFTH SONNET

HAPLESS is he or she whose happiness
Depends upon another's constant love,

For such a potent power to curse or bless

A mortal's virtue is too far above :

Seldom it chances that two lovers feel

An equal fervent passion : if the one

Loves with entire and unaffected zeal,

That passion's met with tepid love or none.

Who knows his power is tempted oft to use

That power regardless of another's pain,

And will in mere capriciousness amuse

Himself by feigned indifference or disdain :

'Twere well then ere you love to count the price,—

But when did love e'er listen to advice ?

SUGGESTED BY SHAKESPEARE'S HUNDRED
AND THIRTY-EIGHTH SONNET

THE game of Love's as intricate as Chess,
And few are skilful players of the game ;
Even Shakespeare could not play it with success,
As here he owns with penitence and shame :
Deceit in it, nine cases out of ten,
(Less oft perchance by men than women acted),
Wholly or partly blinds the lover's ken,
And leaves him 'twixt his love and fear distracted.
When Eve loved Adam, Adam's passion failed,
But when she loved him he to her was cool,
Cross purposes thus ever have prevailed,
And lovers thus have always played the fool :
Ever it seems must love and folly chime
As long as poets love and lovers rhyme.

SUGGESTED BY SHAKESPEARE'S HUNDRED
AND FORTY-THIRD SONNET

AND wert thou, Shakespeare ! such a wanton's slave
As this implies ? So humbled to the dust
That thou her favour couldst descend to crave
Knowing she had betrayed thy love and trust ?
Since thou thyself thy weakness dost confess
We needs must credit what we fain would doubt,
Yet not the less our sorrow must express
That such a quean thy reason thus could rout
When thou thy hapless book of love compiled,
Wert thou so blind, like Hazlitt, that therein
Thou couldst not see (so much wert thou beguiled)
Thy text wherefrom to preach on greatness' sin ?
Yet who shall dare thy weakness to arraign,
Since Samson's locks are daily shorn again ?

THE POET OF THE FUTURE

WILL future times another Shakespeare breed,
 Gifted as he who doth our past illumine,
One who shall yet his wondrous powers exceed,
 And so the Arch-Poet's rank and fame assume ?
Yes ! her past exploits Nature can repeat,
 'Though she loves best new miracles to prove,
And while she seems to love our hopes to cheat
 Doth ever forward to new triumphs move.

The Poet of the coming time will own
 All Shakespeare's wisdom, wit, sublimity,
With finer qualities to him unknown
 That might not in an age half-barbarous be :
Shakespeare the spirit of the Past expressed,
His rival will the Future manifest.

SHELLEY

NOBLEST and bravest of the sons of song !

Most selfless and most single-hearted friend
Of the unfriended sufferers of wrong !

Too eager for his peace the world to mend,
Alas ! he knew not men, how hard of heart,

How dim of apprehension, slow to move,
How vain to think he could to them impart
His burning zeal for truth, his boundless love !

His life was but a brief and fevered dream,
Though such a dream as he alone could know ;
Yet wisdom at the end began to stream

Upon him with its mild and steady glow :
Alas that death should then the poet claim
Even in that hour when he *himself* became !

WRITTEN AFTER READING A MEMOIR OF
CLOUGH

ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH! How pleasant sounds
the name!

What wholesome thoughts and memories doth it wake!
How clear of every shadow is its fame,

(Not clearer thine, dear Artist-Poet Blake !)

Spirits like his restore our faith in man

When human baseness makes us most despair,
And lift our thoughts, as only great souls can,
Into a purer and diviner air.

A truer soul on earth was never known ;

Where knowledge might not be, content to stay,
Without vain murmur or unmanly moan,

In the soul's twilight, clamouring not for day.
The thought of him brings to my spirit rest
Whene'er with cheerless thought too much oppressed.

JAMES THOMSON (" B. V.")

HOW much, dear poet-laureate of Despair,
I mourned thy frustrate and unhappy fate,
Which in its toils so hopelessly did snare
Thy soul and laid it waste and desolate !
But now that more than twenty years have passed
No longer do I think of thee with pain,
For that same fate that so thy life did blast,
Is now thy friend and shall thy friend remain.
Time to a deathless song hath turned thy woe ;
Britain henceforth will glory in thy name ;
Its lustre with the centuries shall grow,
And vainly shall the censurer defame :
Few names in Time's great book of bards shall shine
More brightly in the years to come than thine !

SYDNEY DOBELL

ONE Milton only has our nation had,
And scarcely may we ever hope to see
Another gifted with sublimity
Like his, and in such robes majestic clad :
Yet once, had fate but given his genius scope,
And lent him health of body and of mind,
There might have been now in our hearts enshrined
One fit with themes as great as his to cope ;
For Milton's aims than his were not more high,
Nor in his soul was there a brighter flame
Then that which burnt within the feeble frame
Of him who else had matched his song. Ah ! why
Doth fate so often give and yet withhold—
A soul of fire by fleshly ills controlled ?

MATTHEW ARNOLD

HE looked around upon a world of wrong
With mingled scorn and pity infinite ;

He saw the weak made victims of the strong,
And obscene darkness triumph over light :

He saw that men, unmoved by argument,
Who still refused to learn in wisdom's school,

Shrank from the lash of satire's chastisement,
And feared the laughing lips of ridicule :

He saw the falseness of the common creeds
And cared not to conceal his deep disdain,

Yet from himself could not root out the weeds
Convention had implanted in his brain :

And so he failed to see how vain the task
New wine to pour into an outworn cask.

HERBERT SPENCER

(Died December 8th, 1903.)

SO passes from a light, unthinking world,
Too mean so great a soul to understand,
One who before its heedless eyes unfurled
The example of a life most nobly planned :
To one great purpose resolutely bent,
Whose magnitude might well the boldest daunt,
He ceased not to pursue it, though o'er-spent
By unremitting toil and sickness gaunt.

Rest now in peace ! for thou hast left behind
The noblest of all human monuments :
The record of a free and fearless mind
That sought for truth nor cared for precedents ;
That had no selfish aim, no cause to plead,
Nor would from truth, though hard and stern, recede.

JOHN DAVIDSON

“DEEDS all done and songs all sung,” he said,
And straightway leaped into the waters dark,
Quenching therein a vital-glowing spark
Which, radium-like, its scintillations shed
Upon a world which loves a ——’s* lead,
But to a bard authentic will not hark :
Well, let it prize the crow above the lark,
And make its meal of chaff instead of bread.

How of her bards is Britain prodigal !
They glorify their nation and are paid,
(As fitting in so profitless a trade,)
With scanty praise and pence illiberal :
They chant great songs by noble motives swayed,
And all the long-eared bray a serenade.

* The reader can fill in this blank according to his own taste
or prepossessions.

WALT WHITMAN

MY admiration's lukewarm at the best
For thy so aptly-titled "Leaves of Grass,"

Wherein I think few flowers of fancy rest

Which the world may not unregarded pass :
But two things gain my recognition warm :—

Thy honest, open, and transparent soul,
Which no mean thought or passion did deform,

True to all truth as needle to the pole ;
And next thy artless and unlaboured prose

Wherein, as though in easy converse, thou
Thine inmost genial nature dost disclose

Which holds no secret thou mightst not avow :
Few are the souls in times so sick as these
So free from morbid fancies or disease.

WRITTEN AFTER READING SWINBURNE'S
"WHITMANIA"

H EAVEN knows that no Whitmaniac am I ;
I cannot rank him with the truly great,
Nor do I rate him as a thinker high ;
His work is far too formless, inchoate :—
Yet am I tempted to become one now
By this so fierce and merciless attack,
This dragging through the horsepond and the slough
By one who worshipped him a short while back.
Were all this furious diatribe plain truth
(And much is but the outcome of mere spleen),
What need was there to say it ? Should not ruth
For age and pain from such an onslaught screen ?
Was it well you, Apollo's prosperous son,
Should strike a bard by time and want undone ?

TO E. V. LUCAS

(Editor of the Works of Charles and Mary Lamb)

A PLEASANT and a grateful task is thine
Filling thy days with self-rewarding toil,
And nights with dreams wherein two spirits shine
Scarce freer *now* than *then* from earthly soil.
Happy are they in thy so loving care ;
Happy art thou whom fortune so has blest :
They would have loved thy genial heart and brain
And kinship to themselves in thee confessed.
Unlovely traits that cannot daylight bear
Keen search too oft in seeming goodness shows—
Search how thou wilt, nothing save what is fair
And kind and true in them shall time disclose :
From every shadow of dishonour free
Clear is their fame, and clear shall ever be.

TO A. H. BULLEN

(*Dedicatory Sonnet of "Rosemary and Pansies"*)

I THOUGHT, old friend, a better gift to bring
Than this poor garland, rather weeds than flowers,
Not the rich product of calm leisured hours,
But such as I from toil and haste could wring :
Yet take it, since 'tis coinage of mine own,
That bears at least the stamp of thought sincere,
Which from no consequence recoils in fear,
But seeks for truth unveiled—and truth alone.

Like yours, it is my greatest happiness
To delve within the ancient mines of gold,
And disinter from dust, decay, and mould
Long-buried treasures held in time's duress ;
But here, a modern of the modern time,
A spirit that questions all is in my rhyme.

MUSIC AND POETRY

I.

TWO stars there are by which my course I steer —
Two stars which fadeless ever must remain,
And shining o'er me save me from all fear
Of shipwreck upon life's tempestuous main :
From them my soul derives its chief delight ;
They comfort me when all around is dark,
Lifting my spirit with their influence bright,
As air and sun inspire the mounting lark.

Music and Poetry ! most benignant pair
Of all that shed their beams on human-kind,
For ever youthful, fresh, and debonnair,
Best solacers and healers of the mind :
Beneficent all other powers above,
Or only rivalled by divinest Love !

II.

WHENE'ER to words of kindness or of love
The tongue is tuned, music is in our speech,
And then we rise our baser selves above,
And for awhile our dreamed-of Eden reach.
Perchance in planets happier than ours
All speech is music and all music speech ;
No discords there disturb the golden hours,
No imprecations harsh the fates impeach :
Life there to blithest symphonies is set,
And dulcet harmony doth ever reign ;
No clashing elements are there to fret ;
No force compels and no conventions chain :
No heaven is needed there, no fear of hell,—
Such wondrous power in harmony doth dwell.

MUSIC AND MELANCHOLY

MUSIC is ever melancholy's friend,
For even when its notes are full of sadness,
A tranquillizing power doth with them blend
Strong to redeem the anguished soul from madness :
Sorrow expressed is sorrow of its sting
Deprived and softened to a milder grief,
And thus the poet if he can but sing
His sorrow from his utterance gains relief.
'Tis well that men should oftentimes be sad,
For sadness is the fount of all deep thought ;
Who knows it not is never truly glad :
By levity no great thing may be wrought :
So music in its melancholy mood
Is human nature's best and choicest food.

THE POWER OF HARMONY

MUSIC is of the universe the soul,
Pervading and controlling all that is ;
The fount of all and of all things the goal ;
In which all contraries converge and kiss.
The spheres in answer to its touch vibrate,
And through void space its harmonies resound,
Making a mighty symphony elate
With chords which Nature's deepest truths expound :
Its energy awakes all things to life,
And makes even while it seems to break all laws :
Seems, yet but seems, to set all things at strife,
And is at once no less effect than cause :
Were once the mighty harmony to cease,
Farewell to order, measure, rule, and peace.

.

BACH'S SECOND CONCERTO *

WHAT fresh and breezy joyousness is here,
What youthful spirit, what rapture of delight,
What scorn of baseness, what contempt of fear !
What power to put all sombre thoughts to flight !
Once more the world is full of old romance,
Once more life's jarring keys are all in tune,
Once more in woodland scenes the fairies dance,
And desolate winter turns to glorious June !

Ah ! could man's life to such a tune be set,
Its dull beat changed for these exultant strains,
What room were there for sorrow or regret,
Or who could doubt that God exists and reigns ! . . .
The music dies—and I am sad again,
But with a tenderer grief, a milder pain.

* This Concerto belongs to a set written at Coethen in 1721 for the Margraf of Brandenburg, and known consequently as "The Brandenburg Concertos."

MOZART AND WAGNER

TH' old master's music captivates the sense
With all-pervading and persuading power
We listen ever with delight intense
And drink it in as drinks the dew the flower :
The hours go by and still we sit entranced,
And rise at last unwearied and unsated,
Our joy of life rekindled or enhanced ;
In spirit and in senses recreated.

But Wagner, like a rushing whirlwind, storms us,
And, despot-like, submission doth demand :
Perchance to faithful subjects he transforms us—
Yet some so rude a summons will withstand ;
Though with the demi-gods he must be classed
His genius wearies and exhausts at last.

“ DON GIOVANNI ”

(Covent Garden, July 25th, 1902)

SURE of himself and of his power to do
Whatever task is from his art required,
The artist truly great needs not to woo
The muse, since he is ever self-inspired.
The supreme poet, painter, or musician
Does easily and as a thing of course
What the less-gifted strive with hard volition
To emulate—vain exercise of force !
So Mozart's inspirations came unsought
And never failed him ; whatsoe'er his theme
His soul responded to each call and wrought
From each a thing immortal and supreme :
So, born for endless time, not for an age,
He lives, the Shakespeare of the lyric stage.

AFTER A CONCERT

'TIS o'er—and where has gone the melody
That filled my soul with such intense delight ?
Have golden chords like these fled utterly
Into the still and unresponsive night ?
Will they no more my drooping thoughts upstay
In days to come when dark despondence reigns ?
Will they no more illumine life's dull grey,
No more with rich exultance ease its pain ?

Content thyself : 'tis much two golden hours
To pluck from out the niggard hands of fate :
Ask not for more, lest in return it sours
Your days with dullness at a double rate :
Yet will some echo of the chords remain,
That shall in days of gloom my soul sustain.

THE SONNET

I.

THE sculptor who can best design a grand
Titanic figure towering sublime,
Can show an art as absolute and prime
When he a cameo carves with cunning hand :
Do well the task your genius doth command,
Or large or small 'twill bear the test of time :
A few surviving shreds of matchless rhyme
For Sappho's witness to all ages stand.
The Sonnet in its narrow space may show
Power as completely as an epic may ;
And Milton doth as much in them display
As in his sacred narrative the glow
Of his transcendent genius, which shines
For ever in their strong triumphant lines.

II.

A SONNET is a hit or miss affair,
And far more often than a hit a miss,
For sense and sound alike must in it share,
And hard it is to get the pair to kiss :
You want a striking or ingenious thought,
Unhackneyed, yet not far-fetched or obscure,
And when 'tis found it yet has to be wrought
To such a form as will all tests endure.
You write a hundred, yet but two or three
Will satisfy an inquisition stern,
Though all are passable in their degree,
Not greatly good and yet too good to burn :
But here's the comfort—Shakespeare's self sometimes
For a sonnet cheats us with a set of rhymes.

TO THE CRITIC

THE work is finished ; if 'tis good or bad
I know not and must leave you to assess :
But whether you condemn or praise, no less
Of its accomplishment shall I be glad ;
For in it, not obscurely veiled or clad,
My verse doth much of what I am express,
Although it may be that some wariness
It needs to find its message gay or sad.
Whether the verse attract you or repel
In it at least there's nothing insincere ;
And if no powerful inspiration swell
Its music to a note divine and clear,
Some undertones perchance may in it dwell
That will to some kind hearts the bard endear.

FINIS

NOTE

THE greater part of the Sonnets included in the present volume are now printed for the first time. The rest were published in "Rosemary and Pansies," a volume of Verse which is now nearly out of print. These latter, however, have been carefully revised, and (it is hoped) improved.

Perhaps it may be worth while to state that the Sonnets herein contained have been written at various times during the last twenty years; and therefore if the reader finds in them some inequalities of merit, or some inconsistencies of thought, it is only what might be naturally expected. I might of course have corrected or expunged these inconsistencies; but I have preferred to let them stand, since there is, I believe, on the whole a sufficient unity of thought and feeling, and the exceptions are of very minor importance.

Some of the Sonnets will probably be regarded as the outcome of personal experiences rather than as the expression of imaginary feelings. Without caring to deny that this may be the case in some instances, I desire the reader to bear in mind the fact that the poet—if I may be allowed to assume so proud a title—often raises an imposing structure upon a very small groundwork of fact. It is said that a mountain in labour once brought forth a mouse; but Homer in labour with the Iliad brought forth a mountain from what was probably only a tolerably large molehill.

NOTE

Shakespeare did, I believe, unlock his soul in his Sonnets, yet not in such a way as to make their meaning plain to those who read as they run. He was not a literal recorder of facts, but a poet to whom the material he worked upon was no more than the web upon which to embroider the rich design woven by his imagination. This indeed is (or should be) always the object of the poet, whose work is valueless if it does not so re-create or re-fashion the common things or thoughts of the life of man as to give them a new significance; or at least exhibit them in a novel point of view.

Perhaps I had better say here that with regard to the first of the Sonnets on "The Sonnet" (p. 98), I am not sure that it is altogether original. It is certainly not a conscious plagiarism; but I have a haunting impression of having at some time met with a Sonnet having some resemblance to it, or to parts of it. However, as I have failed to trace any previous Sonnet from which it may have been derived, I have printed it, trusting that the present explanation may be received as a sufficient apology if it should prove that I have been in this case an unconscious borrower.



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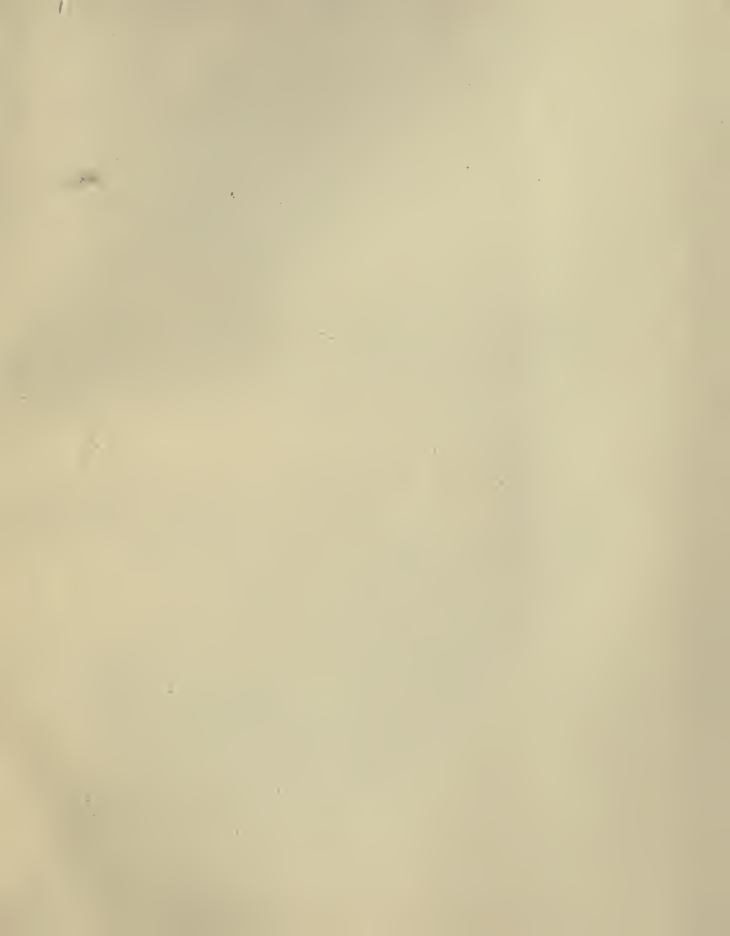
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